

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER MICHAEL J. COPPS**

Re: *Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service; Highland Cellular, Inc. Petition for Designation as an Eligible Telecommunications Carrier in the Commonwealth of Virginia*

The long-term viability of universal service depends on a more rigorous review process for ETC applications. Today's decision, like the decision in *Virginia Cellular* that preceded it, represents a step in the right direction. During the coming year, as we consider the Joint Board's guidance, we need to seize the opportunity to improve it further. We must give serious consideration to the consequences that flow from using the fund to support several competitors in truly remote areas. We also need to bear in mind that when we do fund competition, our rules must provide the right level of support.

I look forward to this important dialogue at the Commission. To keep the country well-connected, we must ensure that all Americans enjoy comparable services at comparable rates.